

# Taking Steps Toward PK-3 Success



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## CRITICAL PK-3 QUALITY INDICATORS

In 2005, The National Education Association (NEA) conducted a study of the role of collective bargaining agreements in improving the working conditions of teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, kindergarten, and first through third grades. The resulting summary brief, *Collective Bargaining for PK-3 Success*, identified six working conditions that are important to teacher effectiveness and positively influence child outcomes: class size, length of instructional day, entry-level personnel requirements, ongoing professional development, role of paraeducators, or teaching assistants, and planning time.

*Collective Bargaining for PK-3 Success* revealed that state policies created barriers to improving working conditions through collective bargaining for class size, length of instructional day, and entry-level personnel requirements. In regards to ongoing professional development, role of paraeducators, and planning time, state policies could go further to support teacher effectiveness and promote student learning.

This tandem brief, *Taking Steps Toward PK-3 Success*, examines state policies and practices regarding these critical PK-3 working conditions and identifies strategies to influence teacher job quality through collective bargaining and other collaborative processes. This document is designed to support efforts to change or implement policies that *will* change the teaching and learning environments for our youngest learners. Please note that it is not critical what methods are used to create, influence and change policy. It is important that the teachers and children are supported in their work.

### Collective Bargaining and State Statutes

Unions and school districts use collective bargaining and other collaborative processes to address “professional issues” that impact teaching and the learning environment by bringing the experts—the school employees—to the table as equals and by formally holding the partners accountable to the bargained agreement. NEA state and local affiliates also use a variety of methods, including collective

bargaining, to get promises made and kept.

The first and most familiar is actual statute-guided collective bargaining. This procedure is defined in state law, rules, and regulations, and carried out by the local union and the governing board of the district, county, or parish. It may include specific guidance about the scope of bargaining, the time schedule, the parties and other items. In very specific laws, it is frequently the case that professional issues are not addressed. However, unions define these as “working conditions” to successfully address issues that impact student learning. A state law with a broad scope of bargaining is in the interest of all parties, but local school boards and unions must be committed to the implementation of any agreements.

In states without bargaining laws, local governing bodies and their union counterparts may just agree to bargain.

Unrestricted by law, the scope of bargaining is frequently broad and can include professional issues. This method of impacting policy at the local district level requires a well-organized local union effort to advocate that these issues be addressed, strong activity in the election of the governing body members, and local adherence to the agreement.

Lastly, in states where bargaining is actually prohibited by law, the local governing body and local union work to put professional issues into school board policy. This method can allow inclusion of items directly related to both employee professional issues as well a student learning issues. However, relationships between the governing board and union require constant oversight, since laws, rules or regulations bind neither entity.

Clearly, to achieve the best teaching and learning environments for students in pre-kindergarten through third grade, a variety of methods may be employed. The important thing is we work together to continue taking steps toward PK-3 success.

The PK-3 Approach entails voluntary universal preschool, mandatory full-day kindergarten, and aligned standards, curriculum and assessment practices

## CLASS SIZE



### **Pre-K Outcomes Merit the Effort**

While much of the research on class size and child-to-adult ratios does not distinguish between state-funded Pre-K initiatives and other child care centers, licensing standards for state-funded programs are more likely than child care centers to meet the ratios recommended by national organizations such as the National Institute for Early Education Research and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Class sizes of no more than 20 children with a teacher-child ratio of 1:10 are recommended. The average Pre-K class size is 17.4 children, with a teacher-child ratio of 7.6:1. Of the 45 state Pre-K initiatives in the United States, 32 have maximum class size policies and 33 have child-to-teacher ratio requirements that are equal to or better than recommended levels. Eight states—California, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Nevada, New Jersey (non-Abbott districts), Pennsylvania, and Texas—have no limit on Pre-K class size, while the remaining thirteen initiatives fail to meet recommended levels.

### **Smaller K-3 Classes = Greater Achievement**

Class size and its impact on student achievement has been an important topic in the debate around public elementary school reform. A well-known meta-analysis of research on class size from 1900-1978 found that reducing class size to 15 students or fewer could be expected to noticeably improve student achievement.

The Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio Project compared curriculum-based and standardized test scores of K-3 students in small classes of 13-17 to those in larger classes of 22-25 with a teacher aide, and to those in larger classes of 22-25 without a teacher aide. The analysis showed that by first grade, students in the smaller classes had an advantage in reading, math, and study skills over both of the other groups. By second grade, students in the smaller classes sustained the gains, but their advantage was no longer accelerating.

Reduced class size especially benefited minority students, significantly narrowing the achievement gap between them and their white counterparts. Longitudinal analysis of a sub-sample that remained in the same classroom arrangements and geographic region for kindergarten and first grade confirmed that smaller classes resulted in greater achievement gains for students in the early grades, particularly for children of color.

Nationally, pupil/teacher ratios ranged from a low of 11:3 in Vermont to a high of 22:3 in Utah. Other states with low pupil/teacher ratio policies are Nevada with 15:1 in core curriculum classes, Iowa with 17:1, and Minnesota with a district average of 17:1. California caps its K-3 classes at 20 students per teacher, but its actual pupil/teacher ratio is 21:1.

### **Fifteen Children per Class is Optimal**

*NEA believes in an optimum class size of 15 students in regular programs and a proportionately lower number in programs for students with exceptional needs.<sup>1</sup> Class sizes of approximately 15 children, beginning in kindergarten and sustained for at least three years, produce the greatest achievement for students in primary grades. Additionally, students who have had the benefit of smaller classes in their early years continue to reap academic benefits through their middle school and high school years and are more likely to take college entrance exams.*

## **Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators**

States should develop plans to phase in class size reductions that address:

- Funding
- Facilities
- Staffing
- Professional development and instruction
- Equitable distribution of qualified teachers

## **Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates**

NEA Affiliates should consider the following contract language and policies when advocating for optimal class sizes for Pre-K and kindergarten:

- Limiting the number of students that may be assigned to Pre-K and kindergarten classes.
- Establishing a method for weighting students based on their needs, giving special consideration to young children and students with special needs. Weights may be defined in a formula appearing in the contract, or can be arrived at by a committee or team.
- Requiring that an instructional aide be assigned to Pre-K and kindergarten classes.
- Establishing student ratios for teachers working in half-day Pre-K and kindergarten programs to ensure comparable class sizes.

## LENGTH OF INSTRUCTIONAL DAY



### **Longer Pre-K Days = Greater Improvements**

Some research suggests that the length of day of preschool programs can impact child outcomes. The majority of Pre-K state initiatives operate on a part-day basis, five days a week. Ten state initiatives provided full-day preschool, twelve offered part-day, and the rest offer a full-day and half-day option. Twenty-three state initiatives operated five days per week. Colorado's and Michigan's programs both run less than five days per week, and the remaining state initiatives' schedules are determined locally.

Evaluation of universal Pre-K in Tulsa, Oklahoma, compared achievement test scores of 1,567 new pre-kindergartners to those of 1,461 new kindergartners to assess the impact of Tulsa's Pre-K program on school readiness. Hispanic and African American children in full-day programs saw greater improvements in letter-word identification, spelling, and applied problems than those in half-day programs, though both settings produced significant positive results. White children in half-day programs experienced significant increases in letter-word recognition and spelling, but those in full-day programs only saw significant improvements in spelling.

### **An Ongoing Debate in the States**

Length of day has been a point of contention in the debate on how and where to invest in early care and education programs. One criticism of state-funded Pre-K programs is that, unlike child care programs, they typically only provide care for children on a part-day, part-year basis. Most state-funded Pre-K programs are open for 2.5 to 3.5 hours per day, five days per week for the academic year. Many states, however, also coordinate with other programs and services to compensate for the lack of a full-day schedule.

Working parents may not be able to enroll their children in part-day programs that aren't effectively coordinated with other early care options, which may exclude children that stand to benefit a great deal from high quality early education. Quality full-day programs would be particularly helpful to disadvantaged children and to parents participating in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), particularly due to stringent work requirements.

### **Full-Day K Creates Greater Gains**

At the public elementary school level, research on length of day focuses on half-day versus full-day kindergarten and its effects on school readiness and achievement in the early grades. Analysis of a random sample of Baltimore first graders examined the impact of white and African American children's kindergarten experience on their cognitive achievement in the first grade, and whether impacts differed by race or sex. The study found that children in full-day kindergarten had better cognitive outcomes early in the first grade year compared with children attending half-day or no kindergarten. This effect was particularly strong for African American children.

A more recent study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics called the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, found that English-speaking kindergartners across the United States who had participated in full-day kindergarten made greater gains in reading and mathematics than children in half-day programs.

Currently, only nine states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and West Virginia) require districts to offer full-day kindergarten.<sup>2</sup> The majority of state initiatives run 2.5-3 hours per day. Some states offer a half-day and full-day option. For example, Colorado requires 450 hours for half-day kindergarten and 900 hours for full-day kindergarten.<sup>3</sup>

### **Full-Day Offers More Learning Opportunities**

*NEA supports full-day kindergarten and Pre-K because they present opportunities for increased instructional time during which children can be engaged in meaningful learning activities.<sup>4</sup> The amount of instructional time in half-day or full-day Pre-K and kindergarten programs is most often determined by state statute.*

*By and large, contracts specify the length of the workday for teachers, regardless of grade level. The experience of NEA members and Bargaining Specialists indicates that the workloads and responsibilities of teachers working in half-day and full-day Pre-K and kindergarten programs vary greatly.*

## **Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators**

- States should expand opportunities for three and four-year old children to attend full-day, full-year Pre-K programs.
- All states should make kindergarten compulsory and require districts to offer it and require all five-year old children to attend.
- States should provide adequate funding for full-day kindergarten.
- States should align the minimum number of daily instructional hours for full-day kindergarten with grades 1-3.
- States should assign the same funding weight to children in full-day kindergarten that is provided to children in grades 1-12.

In the case of insufficient funding, qualified staff, or facilities, states should encourage districts to phase in full-day kindergarten, offering programs to at-risk populations first.

## **Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates**

NEA affiliates should develop a comprehensive agenda to advocate for full-day Pre-K and kindergarten programs. The agenda should include:

- Assessing the political landscape in your state.
- Determining the cost of the program.
- Identifying potential funding sources (Title I or dedicated funding from a specific revenue source, such as an excise or sales tax).
- Developing an advocacy strategy (legislative, lobbying the school board, ballot initiative).
- Identifying potential partners.
- Preparing to counter opposition.
- Considering creative routes to achieving full-day scheduling for kindergartners, such as limiting the number of students that may be assigned to kindergarten teachers.
- Ensuring that teachers working in half-day kindergarten programs receive manageable workloads (see section on class size).
- Ensuring that transitions from half-day to full-day kindergarten are accompanied with adequate professional development, housed in appropriate facilities, and equipped with the appropriate instructional materials.

For additional information and resources about advocating for full-day kindergarten, refer to NEA's *Full-day Kindergarten: An Advocacy Guide*, available at [www.achievementgaps.org](http://www.achievementgaps.org).

## ENTRY-LEVEL PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS



### **High Quality Teachers, High Quality Classrooms**

Of the 44 state preschool programs operating as of 2002-2003, only 23 required all lead teachers to have a bachelor's degree, though two-thirds of the initiatives required a bachelor's degree for preschools operating in public schools.

Research suggests that high quality classrooms depend on high quality teaching skills. Analysis of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study assessed classroom quality through measures of teacher practices (developmental appropriateness), sensitivity (level of sensitivity, harshness, detachment, or permissiveness), style (didactic versus child-centered), and responsiveness. The study found that classroom quality, as defined above, had the most substantial impact on children's cognitive development in language and math, compared with other skill areas, and that the impact on children's math skills was sustained through the second grade.

### **Quality is a Matter of Degrees**

There is contention over whether a bachelor's degree makes a better teacher than an associate's degree plus a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) or other combinations of training. Still, a recent meta-analysis of 33 quantitative studies that examine the relationships between teacher education level, preschool program quality and child outcomes finds that children have more positive learning experiences in preschool classrooms when their teachers have higher levels of education, with a bachelor's degree producing the largest effects.

### **Greater Public School Student Achievement**

According to analysis of U.S. public school teacher credentials from the Schools and Staffing Survey data and public school achievement scores from the National Association for Educational Progress (NAEP), full teacher certification and a degree in the field to be taught are the teacher quality factors most positively and significantly correlated with greater public school student achievement in reading and math. Not all states participate in the NAEP, and so results are not representative of the entire U.S.

For kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers, a college BA/BS degree is one of the requirements for an initial teaching certificate. Most states also require that a teacher pass a subject matter exam, except for Montana and Wyoming. Many states required clinical experience during teacher training. The amount of time required, however, varies by state.

For example, Maryland requires 20 weeks of clinical experience, Idaho requires six semester hours, and Arkansas requires eight semester hours. Eight states (Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Montana, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington) and the District of Columbia do not require clinical experience for teacher training.

## Prepared Teachers, Better Prepared Students

*NEA believes that early childhood education programs must be staffed by teachers, administrators, and support staff who are prepared in early childhood education and child development.<sup>5</sup> According to the National Academy of Science's Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, children in early childhood programs should be taught by teachers with bachelor's degrees who have specialized training in early childhood education.*

## Three Critical Reasons for Affiliate Advocacy

It is imperative that state and local affiliates advocate for increasing the education and training of Pre-K teachers for three reasons:

**One:** Even when teachers enter the teaching profession through non-traditional or alternative routes in grades K through 12, they hold at least a bachelor's degree and there are clear expectations that they make progress towards obtaining licensure and certification. However, in many states, Pre-K teachers are not required to have a bachelor's degree and there is no expectation that they ever attain one. Experts agree and research supports that Pre-K teachers should hold a bachelor's degree with specialized training in child development and early childhood education.

**Two:** Pre-K teachers report not having access to district sponsored professional development, training and funds for course work that might lead to a degree. Furthermore, there is often a salary gap between Pre-K teachers and other K-12 personnel that prevent them from getting additional training and education without these benefits. NEA and its affiliates can ensure that adequate supports are in place for Pre-K teachers to pursue higher education.

**Three:** Many states are starting or expanding existing Pre-K programs. Associations such as the Connecticut Education Association are working to ensure that new Pre-K programs in their state will employ teachers that hold bachelor's degrees and who are eligible for NEA membership.

## Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators

- States should require publicly funded pre-kindergarten teachers to have a four-year college degree and be certified in early childhood education.
- States should design systems to enable those currently working in pre-kindergarten programs to get degrees and become certified.
- States should provide preschool teachers with salaries and benefits comparable to those of similarly qualified K-12 educators.

## Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates

- NEA Affiliates should urge state & local policy makers to increase the education of Pre-K teachers through initiatives that provide scholarships, stipends, and release time in states that do not require them to hold a bachelor's degree.
- Affiliates should consider becoming advocates for increasing the education and training of Pre-K teachers. See "Three Critical Reasons" at left.

## ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



### **A Critical Component of Student Achievement**

The amount of in-service training state-funded pre-kindergarten teachers attend varies greatly by state. A survey conducted in 2005 found that Pre-K teachers spent 32.9 hours in training during a 12-month time period. Research has shown that training and workshops increase the quality of caregiving among teachers without formal education, which is largely the case for Pre-K teachers.

Teachers' ongoing professional development is widely viewed as an important component of elementary and secondary school reform and student achievement. According to the 1993-1994 and 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys, participation in in-service professional development programs is on the increase.

In 1993-94, 64 percent of all public school teachers participated in a professional development program related to teaching methods and 30 percent participated in subject-focused programs. By 1999-2000, 73 percent of public school teachers participated in methods-focused programs, and 59 percent participated in content-based programs.

Most teachers, however, spent eight hours or less in professional development. In the 1993-94 survey, about a quarter of teachers reported receiving reimbursement for travel or tuition fees; one-third reported receiving credits for their participation; but nearly a quarter of teachers reported not receiving reimbursement, credit, release time for external programs, or built-in development programs at all.

### **Key Factors for Ensuring Successful Outcomes**

A program evaluation of eight schools that improved student achievement through successful professional development demonstrates that in addition to the quality of program content, the effectiveness of professional development programs depend upon broader school support. Specifically, the report details some of the key factors for ensuring that professional development works, such as developing the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers; embedding teacher learning into the school day; encouraging input on professional development from teachers themselves; recognizing that development takes time and resources; and basing professional development and its evaluation on a long-term plan for improving student achievement.

This suggests that merely increasing teachers' engagement in professional development programs is not sufficient. Teachers need to be included in goal-setting for student achievement; they need to take part in professional development programs that are time-intensive and

collaborative, and that give them the best teaching skills and strategies; and teachers need full support from their school community.

## Professional Development, Improved Learning

*NEA believes that continuous professional development is required for teachers and administrators to achieve and maintain the highest standards of student learning and professional practice. The Association believes that professional development should:*

- Be based upon clearly articulated goals.
- Be designed and directed by the affected professionals at each site.
- Assist teachers in meeting the needs of students.
- Be incorporated into the teaching profession as an essential component of the work schedule.
- Provide training for the implementation of new programs.
- Provide training in the development of new and revised curriculum.
- Provide time during the regular workday and work year for inquiry, research, reflection, and collaboration.
- Provide opportunities for mentoring with colleagues.
- Be standards-referenced and incorporated with the best principles of teaching and learning.
- Be career-long, rigorous and sustained.
- Stimulate intellectual develop and leadership capacity.
- Balance individual priorities with the needs of the school district.
- Provide a depth of subject matter knowledge and a greater understanding of learning styles.
- Provide opportunities to apply new learnings and changes in practice.
- Provide opportunities to provide new roles, including leadership positions.
- Include an ongoing assessment and evaluation component to determine effectiveness.
- Provide flexibility for the use of a variety of resources, such as university-school partnerships, professional development schools, exchange programs, professional development resource centers, and cultural and business resources.<sup>6</sup>

## Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators

- States should require recipients of state funds and state-administered federal funds to focus professional development increasing student performance.
- States should establish criteria for what constitutes effective, results-based professional development and provide districts and schools with detailed information about the state rules and regulations governing professional development.
- States should provide support to districts to collect data about student outcomes to design and evaluate local professional development activities.
- States should periodically examine the alignment of existing policies with those that have shown the most promise for impact on teacher practice and student learning.
- States should fund research and evaluation to determine whether the professional development that the state funds is reducing the achievement gaps.

## Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates

- Participate in the development of the policies governing professional development requirements.
- Participate in the process to align professional development activities with state standards and district curricula.
- Participate in activities to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development policies and activities.
- Provide feedback to administrator and policymakers regarding professional development plans and activities.

## ROLE OF PARAEDUCATORS

### Teaching Assistants in Pre-kindergarten

Little research exists on the relationship between the presence of paraeducators (teaching assistants or aides with a teaching role), and child outcomes in preschool settings. However, smaller group sizes and child-to-adult ratios have positive effects on child outcomes and paraeducators may enable a reduction in both. Also clear in the research on early care and education is the relationship between caregiver quality and child outcomes in terms of cognitive, social, and emotional development. Better-qualified paraeducators may provide teachers with better support, enabling them to provide higher quality care.

A recent study of 3,898 teachers in 52 state-funded pre-kindergarten programs across 40 states found that 36 of 52 programs did not require any formal training for paraeducators, 12 required a high school diploma or GED, and four required a CDA credential. Despite low requirements, the study also found that 59.1 percent of paraeducators had a high school diploma or GED, 17.3 percent had a CDA, and 23.6 percent had an Associate's degree or higher.

According to the 1997 update of the National Child Care Staffing Study, assistant teachers earn \$7.00 per hour or less and have a 34 percent turnover rate. Low wages for early care and education teachers are associated with lower teacher quality, higher turnover, and overall lower quality programs.

### Aides in Kindergarten through Grade 3

Public school paraeducators serve a wide variety of important functions that contribute to quality K-3 classroom instruction. They provide support to children with special education needs, children that speak English as a second language, and children of low-income families, as well as provide general support to teachers. Despite the clear demand for paraeducators of various types, little work has been done to quantify the impact of their presence in the classroom on student achievement or to isolate the kind of assistance that most influences student achievement or teacher quality.

Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio Project results showed that first grade students in regular size classrooms with a full-time teacher aide (of an unspecified role) outperformed first grade students in regular sized classes with no aide, but this effect was not observed among students in the second and third grades.

Another large-scale study, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, found that African American children in full-day kindergarten classes with a teacher's aide made greater gains in



reading compared to African American children in full-day classes without an aide. However, because this study's design was non-experimental, differences among students upon entering kindergarten are not taken into account, and thus a direct link between teacher aides and achievement cannot be made.

### **Minority or Bilingual Paraeducators**

There is also evidence that minority or bilingual paraeducators can break down cultural barriers to student achievement and teacher/student communication. One small-scale, qualitative study of public elementary schools in primarily Spanish-speaking, Latino communities in southern California examined the role of bilingual and bicultural paraeducators. The study found that Latino paraeducators were better able to engage Latino students (largely ESL learners) and were better able to meet the support needs of those students due to a shared knowledge and experience that allowed for more meaningful and culturally relevant interactions.

These studies suggest that paraeducators enhance the experience of both teachers and students. Paraeducators may be especially helpful for serving children with special needs and from communities of color.

## **Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators**

- States should establish policies and funding to provide one full-time paraeducator in Pre-K through third grade classrooms in low-performing schools.
- States should determine how the articulated knowledge and skills would be integrated into district professional development and human resources.
- States should establish policies and funding to provide one full-time paraeducator in every Pre-K and kindergarten classroom.
- States should provide supports and incentives for paraeducators to participate in professional development activities.
- States should clearly define the knowledge and skills for specific paraeducators roles. Paraeducators working with children in Pre-K through third grade should have education and training in early childhood education, specifically in child development.

## **Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates**

- Affiliates should advocate for the provision of paraeducators in every Pre-K through third grade classroom in low performing schools.
- Affiliates should ensure that paraeducators have access to appropriate professional development and training.

## PLANNING TIME

### Steps for State Policymakers and Regulators

- States should provide the funding and necessary supports that allow teachers adequate time for individual, team, and school-wide planning.

### Steps for State and/or Local Affiliates

Affiliates should work collaboratively with administrators to ensure that funding and resources are utilized effectively to provide supports such as:

- Substitute teachers
- Release time
- Additional compensated work days
- Modified school calendars

### The Need for Built-In Planning Time

The ability of teachers to take the time to plan their lessons and prepare for class is also important to the quality of teaching jobs regardless of the grade being taught. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), teachers need designated and collaborative planning time that allows them to share ideas, set common goals, and engage in problem-solving.

A program evaluation conducted by WestEd confirms this assessment. This study looked at eight schools (six of which were elementary schools) that received honors for improving student learning through professional development models. Teachers identified collaborative planning (i.e., grade-level team meetings and group curriculum development) as an important component of their own informal learning and training. Furthermore, authors of the High Scope Perry Preschool study noted that the importance of planning time is often overlooked by schools and educational programs.

### Common Planning Time is Ideal

Despite the need for built-in collaborative release time, most elementary school teachers only receive four or five 45-minute free periods per week (three to four hours) for planning. Pre-kindergarten teachers received an average of 4.1 hours of planning time each week, with 2.2 hours reserved for collaborative planning with another staff member.

This forces teachers to do instructional planning and related work outside of their regular hours without compensation. A 2003 survey of public school teachers conducted by the National Education Association found that in 2001, elementary school teachers spent an average of 10 uncompensated hours per week on instruction-related activities.

NEA believes that common planning time should be provided during the student day for employees to meet for such purposes as interdisciplinary activities/units, team planning time, and coordinating with special education support professionals.<sup>7</sup>



### Taking Steps and Initiating Changes

Ensuring teachers have the proper environment, work support, and training to provide quality early education is critical to job quality and student outcomes and achievement. The PK-3 approach integrates the curriculum, standards and assessments of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and grades 1-3.

Contracts rarely include specific provisions for teachers working with young children or for teachers working in a specific grade levels within the PK-3 grade span. However, the research findings and analysis of contract language suggest a small but solid base upon which to build.

Reducing class size, raising salaries, providing time and support for collaborative planning and teaching, and promoting and supporting effective professional development programs are some of the steps necessary to enable teachers to do their best. NEA believes that collective bargaining can be used effectively to improve conditions for PK-3 overall and for each of the grades in the PK-3 grade span.

Where state statutes and laws prevent it, change must be initiated by taking steps to revise the regulations and requirements. Policymakers, school districts, and educators have the ability to improve children's educational experiences through policies and regulations that improve teachers' job quality. For more information on the PK-3 approach, please see *Collective Bargaining for PK-3 Success* or visit [www.achievementgaps.org](http://www.achievementgaps.org).

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> NEA Resolution B-7 Class Size

<sup>2</sup> Education Commission of the States. Full-day Kindergarten Programs Improve Chances of Academic Success. *The Progress of Education Reform*. 2004, ECS. V5, no.4. September 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Data on minimum required hours and days for kindergarten programs across states are derived from the "State Kindergarten Statues: State Comparisons" section of an online kindergarten database compiled by the Education Commission of the States. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> NEA Policy on Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten

<sup>5</sup> NEA Resolution B-1 Early Childhood Education

<sup>6</sup> NEA Resolution E-2 Time To Teach

<sup>7</sup> Dean, Ceri. B. and Lauer, Patricia. *State Policy Support for Professional Development in the Central Region*. December 2001.



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